DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 448 CE 042 996

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TITLE The Field of Canadian Adult Education: A Bibliographic Inquiry.
PUB DATE 15 Dec 84
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; Adult Educators; *Adult Learning; Adults; *Educational Environment; Educational Research; Foreign Countries; *Individual Characteristics; *Inquiry; *Learning Processes; Research Methodology
IDENTIFIERS *Canada

ABSTRACT

This study examined writings of Canadian adult educators for the purpose of describing their field of inquiry. The study described the field by its four basic areas of inquiry--learner, learning, process, and environment--and by the components of each area. The methodology was divided into three phases: creation of a glossary of descriptive adult education workds; analysis of key words drawn from titles of a 1983-1984 bibliography of reports, papers, articles, and books; and cross-tabulation of title concepts to ascertain significant correlations. Attention was also given to adult educators' approaches to the inquiry process. Findings suggested that Canadian adult educators primarily are interested in the processes of learning and in learning itself. Less interest was directed at the learning environment and learner characteristics. Findings further suggested that the conceptual frameworks used by adult educators tend to include a minimum of two areas of inquiry and usually combine three of the four areas. The most frequent dual combinations were learning/environment and learning/process. The triple combination of learning/environment/process yielded significant correlations. The concept correlations suggested that authors of adult education literature in Canada are generalists whose primary concern is to provide adults with appropriate environments and processes for learning. A short bibliography is included. (Author/YLB)

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THE FIELD OF CANADIAN ADULT EDUCATION; A BIBLIOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

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December 15, 1984.

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THE FIELD OF CANADIAN ADULT EDUCATION; A BIBLIOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

Abstract

This study examined the writings of Canadian adult educators for the purpose of describing their field of inquiry. The study described the field by its four basic areas of inquiry -- learner, learning, process, and environment -- and by the components of each area.

The methodology followed in this survey was divided into three phases: the creation of a glossary of descriptive adult education words, the analysis of all key words drawn from the titles of a 1983-1984 bibliography of reports, papers, articles and books, and the cross-tabulation of title concepts to ascertain significant correlations. Attention also was given to adult educators' approaches to the inquiry process.

The findings suggest that Canadian adult educators primarily are interested in the processes of learning and in the learning itself. Less interest appears to be directed at the environmental conditions required for learning and in the characteristics of the learners.

The findings further suggest that the conceptual frameworks used by adult educators tend to include several areas of inquiry, rather than to focus exclusively on a single area. Their inquiry tends to combine a minimum of two areas and usually combines three of the four areas. The most frequent dual combinations were learning/environment and learning/process. The triple combination of learning/environment/process also yielded significant correlations.

When describing adult educators as members of an intellectual community, the concept correlations suggest that the authors of the adult education literature in Canada are generalists whose primary concern is to provide adults with appropriate environments and processes for learning.

Introduction

Canadian adult education has been considered a separate and unique field of educational endeavor for, at least, the past century. The vocational training programs of the Mechanics Institutes, the personal growth and academic up-grading programs of voluntary associations, the numerous literacy programs for New Canadians, and the community development programs of university extension departments, all are sentinels to a proud history. More recently, government basic skills training programs, community schools and colleges, non-government organization non-formal education programs and continuing education in its various contexts -- public school, university, professional -- have joined in the historical process of adult education.

Over the past decade an intellectual community with a field of inquiry has emerged in adult education. Challenged by MacNeil (1980), Selman (1980), Buttedahl (1983) and Griffith (1983) to begin conducting serious research into the problems and issues facing Canadian adult education, university professors and field practitioners have begun to develop a body of knowledge about adult education practice. Valuable regional, specialized, historical, and general bibliographies (Boshier & Pipke, 1982; Draper, 1980; Selman & MacKeracher, 1982; Dobson, 1984) have been compiled of adult educators' published works. These bibliographies have helped delineate the Canadian field of adult education. Furthermore, the preparation of directories of university professors of adult education by Boshier (1978) and Keane (1980, 1984) has fostered a network among active academics. Finally, the formation of regional and national professional associations has stimulated broader interest in the field among students, practitioners, and academics.

An Emerging Conceptual Framework for Adult Education

The need for an explicit conceptual framework for adult education is a recurrent theme in the literature. Bergevin (1967) has stated that adult educators need a common reference point for their ideas and practices. Blakely (1958), Diekoff (1970), and Roberts (1976) have all argued that an adult education philosophy would provide practitioners with the principles upon which to design a practice. A further suggestion -- that practitioners share notions of an underlying philosophy -- has been forwarded by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982).

On the other hand, Cremin (1975) and Long (1983) have pointed out that adult education philosophy and practice are, in fact, interdependent. Indeed, a conceptual framework for the practice of adult education can be considered to be the result of a complex interplay among adults who want to learn, practitioners who provide learning experiences and institutions that provide resources and environments. The needs of people and the objectives of practitioners within institutions coalesce into a certain theoretical stance supportive of their learning enterprises.

This study does not describe Canadian adult education either in Apps's essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, reconstructionism, and existentialism categories or in Elias and Merriam's liberal, progressive, humanist, behavioral, radical or analytical frameworks, per se. The study does, however, approach the works of these Canadian authors as being reflective (Freire, 1970) of the valued concerns that they must address when seeking to improve their practice. The study should, therefore, provide important indicators of the conceptual framework of practitioners in the field of Canadian adult education.

Methodology

The methodology followed to carry out this study of the current literature of Canadian adult education basically was title word analysis followed by concept correlations. This innovative methodology sought to create quantifiable data out of a qualitative body of material, not unlike abstract empiricism.

Procedure

The procedure for identification and analysis of the words and concepts studied was divided into three phases. The first phase was to prepare a glossary of 503 descriptive words drawn from a bibliography of 556 articles, proceedings' papers, reports, and books written by 216 Canadian -- 32 French-speaking -- adult educators between 1977 and 1984 (Dobson, 1984). The original study data was collected from 32 post-secondary institutions, including 6 in Quebec Province, that had writers and/or programs in adult education.

An extensive process of word analysis, definition and categorization by area and sub-areas (components) of inquiry in adult education followed. This process -- possibly a unique undertaking in the field of adult education in Canada -- yielded both a descriptive and comprehensive picture of the variables related to adult learning. Table 1 provides a listing of the areas and their components. Definitions and descriptions of these concepts are provided in the Findings.

-- Table 1 about here --

The second phase was to use all of the 1983-1984 titles (n=221) from the bibliography. The title words were analyzed in order to determine the relative importance given by Canadian authors to the several areas. The titles then were examined conceptually, through a cross-tabulation procedure, in order to ascertain dual, triple, and quadruple area correlations.

The third, and final, phase was to examine the authors' approaches to inquiry and the research strategies that they used. The research approaches were labeled as qualitative or quantitative. The strategies were categorized by method, general techniques, specific techniques, and instruments used.

Definitions

Descriptive words used in this study were defined according to conventional usage. The following is a glossary of key words used throughout the study. The words were drawn from the glossary prepared in phase one.

-- Figure 1 about here --

Limitations

The study was limited both by the size of the sample and by the meaning of words.

Sample. When the decision to limit the sample to 1983-1984 published titles was made, the author assumed that the total number of descriptive words would be extensive. This was not the case. The number of words in any one category, therefore, suggested the use of frequency counts, percentages and a limited number of correlations.

Word meaning. A second limitation was in the meaning of words. A title word analysis approach assumes that these words accurately represent the content of the articles, proceeding papers, reports and books that they head up. Generally, titles are representative of adult education works, occasionally however, authors use words unconventionally. Such words were either interpreted by the investigator or disregarded. These creatively used words constituted less than two per cent of the 503 words identified for the study. In all cases, however, the interpretation of specific words was controlled by the normative criteria provided by the glossary.

Findings

The findings are presented according to the three phases of the study. Initially, the areas of inquiry in adult education -- namely, the learner, learning, the process, and the environment -- were analyzed to provide descriptions of the components that constitute each area. Subsequently, the titles were analyzed in order to derive areas of interest, and to identify their combinations. Finally, Canadian adult educators' approaches to inquiry are described.

-- Table 2 about here --

Adult learners

In the study the learner was frequently described as an adult with no distinguishing characteristics. A comparison of descriptive words found in the glossary and their usage in the literature titles reviewed, suggests that adult educators use a limited and stable selection of words when describing the adult. When descriptive qualifiers were given to the adult, these qualifiers describe the learner by age, social status, limitations to learning, and social relationships.

Age. The 34 occurrences of age-related words were almost entirely in the use of "adult;" other words were "age" and "mature."

Status. There was a large variety of descriptive words available to indicate learners' social status. Words frequently used included: "Canadian," "student," "learner," "volunteer," and a variety of occupation-specific descriptors.

Limitation. Words which suggest that the inquiry was limited to a certain type of learner were few. Health-disabled learners, "self," and "women" were frequently mentioned types of words in this component.

Relationship. Words which suggest that the inquiry focused on the learners within a group learning relationship were few. Frequently used words describing relationship were "group," "association," and "social."

Although the four components which describe adult learners are comprehensive in scope, the findings suggest that adult educators are primarily concerned with adults by age characteristics. They are not explicitly concerned with adults' social status, personal limitations or group learning relationships.

Learning

Learning was defined as the development of, or change in a person's attitude, knowledge or motor skill. Learning does not, however, occur exclusively in any single one of these components, but in all three simultaneously, with varying degrees of emphasis in each. Language learning was an example of this integration among the three domains.

Frequently used words to describe learning were "education," and "learning." Specialized words which suggest cognitive or affective learning were equally represented in the glossary, although seldom found in the present study. Words describing psychomotor learning occurred less frequently in both the glossary and literature titles.

What has emerged from the analysis of learning-related title words is that adult educators are primarily concerned with

learning in a general way, and not in its specific attitude change, knowledge gain or motor skill development characteristics.

Process

An adult's planned process of learning is a sequence of events directed toward the ability to think, feel and do something that is of significance to the person. The learning process is influenced, on the one hand, by the program method and, on the other, by the instructional techniques used by the process "manager" to communicate and to provide support to the learner.

Method. Adult educators' inquiries appear to be directed primarily toward program planning questions. Process words such as "program," "design," "directed," "strategy," and "study" were frequently used in titles.

Techniques. According to the literature reviewed, intervention in the learning process appears to occur through some motivational, management or verbal communications act. To describe the supporting actions of teachers, such words as "implement," and "intervene were often used. To describe communications, such words as "motivate," "teach," "communicate," "train," and "counsel" were used.

The process findings seem to suggest that adult educators are more concerned with program methodology and less with instructional techniques.

Environment

An environment is the aggregate of physical things and conditions related to the learning process. The "things" which surfaced in the present study were geographic site, physical space and building locale. The conditions included were time, date, institutional support, and interpersonal climate.

Date/Time. Title words, used by Canadian authors, which suggested time or date were dominated by "continuing." Other words in current usage were "recurrent," "lifelong," and "current."

Locale. Literature title words, used to describe locale for learners, included "distance," "extension," "community," and "classroom."

Institutional sponsors. Frequently used words to describe institutional sponsor were "school," "university," and "college."

The environment findings suggest that institutional sponsor as well as date and time are of more interest to adult educators than is the interpersonal climate. Locale, with its wide vocabulary, is also of interest to writers.

Area Concepts in Titles

In the second phase of analysis, the four areas of adult educator inquiry (the learner, learning, the process, and the environment) were considered as concepts. The literature was examined for the purpose of determining the frequency of occurrence of each area concept in the titles and, then, to describe the several combinations of concepts.

When titles were examined to derive area concepts, the general structure of adult educators' inquiries became apparent. The areas were always found in combination. The concepts, nevertheless, were analyzed as single areas and as dual, triple, and quadruple area combinations.

Single areas. When the four areas were isolated as individual concepts, the environment was cited most frequently, followed by learning, process and, finally, adult learners.

-- Table 3 about here --

Dual combinations. When the four areas were paired with each other the environment/learning combination frequently occurred. The process/learning combination closely followed in frequency. The remaining four combinations occurred less frequently.

Triple combinations. When the four areas were placed in a triple relationship the environment/learning/process combination stood out as significant. The resulting correlation was consistent with the preceding findings. The frequency of occurrence of all triple correlations suggests that adult educators consider the problems and issues facing the field of adult education in a holistic manner.

Quadruple combinations. The correlation of all four areas did not occur with a significant frequency in the current inquiry of adult educators.

Method of Inquiry Suggested By Titles

The titles of the adult education literature reviewed often suggested the research methodology used by the writer. Thirty-one per cent of the titles suggested either a qualitative/quantitative approach in the inquiry or a particular strategy for the investigation. The remaining titles did not suggest any particular method of inquiry. The breakdown can be described, more explicitly, as follows:

-- table 4 about here --

Approach. The data suggest that Canadian adult educators favor the qualitative mode of scientific inquiry. Although the

glossary defines approximately the same number of words to describe quantitative and qualitative approaches, almost three times as many qualitative, compared to quantitative, descriptors were used in titles.

Strategy. The strategies for conducting an inquiry were described, primarily, by the use of a certain evaluation technique. Such descriptive words as "analysis," "case," "empirical," "multi-component," "multi-variant," "reflection," "test," and "typology" were examples of the techniques used by adult educators. Frequently these words were used in a combination which suggested the approach, thus, "empirical research" or "case study" or "multi-component analysis" emerged as various approaches.

Discussion

The conceptual foundations of Canadian adult education practice can be clarified through an examination of the publications of its practitioners. The field of intellectual inquiry is divided into four areas of study: the environment, learning, the process, and the adult learner. It appears that the adult educators' primary concern is with the creation of appropriate environments within which learning can take place. Adult educators appear to suggest that process/learning and environment/learning are interdependent concepts which need to be developed jointly.

The writings of Canadian adult educators support the organizational effectiveness orientation to the field, previously identified by Darkenwald & Merriam (1982). The data suggest a strong emphasis on management related issues in adult education (institutions/environments). This apparent shift from the previously held notion that adult educators are primarily concerned with the adult -- as a self-actualized learner seeking personal improvement, or as a participant in the transformation of society (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982) -- raises legitimate questions. For example, has the adverse economic climate in educational institutions forced an apparent pre-occupation with environmental effectiveness -- that is, the provision of a climate which attracts learners and, hence, income ? No answers are suggested, but it is plausible that most authors of the 1983-1984 adult education literature were either program managers, or writing for a management audience. Certainly the literature, during this period, focused primarily on the interests of providers of facilities and services for adult learning. More to the point, however, the differences between the previously perceived focus of adult educators (on adult learners), and the present weighting of management issues reported in the literature, need to be explored further. A repetition of this study for the forthcoming years is therefore suggested. A review of the field, over several years, should provide a clearer indication of trends than is possible from a review of the literature for an isolated period. With the use of the

established glossary of terms, consistency of data should be assured.

Unlike other social science disciplines which foster theoretical specialties, the field of adult education seems to encourage the generalist who seeks to combine areas of inquiry. Likewise, adult educators are concerned with qualitative analyses of the issues and problems confronting the field. Considering the complex and multifaceted issues which surround adult learners and adult learning, the qualitative approach appears to be an appropriate stance. Qualitative research has moved well beyond scientists' original view of the methodology -- as a preliminary, exploratory effort to quantitative research -- to being accepted for the value of its own end product. Nevertheless, as adult educators, we need to remind ourselves that the credibility of our research is dependent on the scientific rigor applied. The explicitness of description, so crucial to qualitative adult education research, has not been evident, consistently, in the past, and warrants an -- albeit repetitious -- note of caution.

The present study was an innovative attempt to describe the field of adult education in Canada by analysis of its publications in a given period. Although the sample was limited, the tentative results are illuminative, in that they raise interesting questions about the actual practice priorities of current Canadian adult educators. If practices are based on beliefs -- as is generally suggested -- then, the conceptual framework of Canadian adult educators may appear to be shifting to reflect an essentially pragmatic view of their roles.

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Figure 1
Adult Education Related Words, Their Area and Component Codes, and Their Definitions; A Glossary Sampler

Word	Area	Component	Definition
AFFECTIVE	LE	AF	To move, stir; emotional arousal
AGE	AD	AG	Period of life
ANALYSIS	EV	MD	To separate into components
APPROACH	PR	MD	To come near to
AREA	EV	QL	A section of a field of inquiry
COGNITIVE	LE	CG	A thinking process
COMMUNICATE	PR	TQ	To inform, tell, apprise
COMPONENT	PR	MD	Aspect of a larger whole
CONCEPT	LE	CG	Notion, idea
DATE	EN	DA	Day of month
EDUCATION	LE		Learning
ENVIRONMENT	EN		Aggregate of things and conditions
EVENT	PR	MD	An occasion, happening
FIELD	LE	CG	A sphere of interest
GROUP	EN	SO	An assemblage
INSTITUTION	EN	OR	A social organization
INSTRUMENT	EV	IN	A tool for measurement
INTERPERSONAL	EN	SO	Between persons
LEARNING	LE		Acquire knowledge, skill, attitude
LOCALE	EN	LO	A physical space
MEDIA	PR	ME	A means of communication
METHOD	PR	MD	A procedure to follow
PROGRAM	PR	MD	An agenda, forecast
PSYCHOMOTOR	LE	PS	Mind-actuated muscle response
QUALITY	EV	QL	An attribute
QUANTITY	EV	QT	An exact amount
SOCIAL	AD	SO	Human beings in community
STRATEGY	PR	MD	A maneuver to achieve an objective
SUPPORT	PR	TQ	To sustain, uphold
TECHNIQUE	PR	TQ	A technical manner of behavior

*See Table 1 for an explanation of adult education codes and Table 5 for evaluation codes

Table 1
Listing of Adult Education Areas and Components

Area	Component
Learner (AD)	Age (AG)
	Status (ST)
	Limitation (LI)
	Social relationship (RE)
Environment (EN)	Date & time (DA)
	Locale (LO)
	Institutional sponsor (OR)
	Interpersonal climate (SO)
Process (PR)	Approach (AP)
	General program (MD)
	Specific program (MD)
	Event (ET)
	Media & material (ME)
	Communication technique (TQ)
	Support technique (TQ)
Learning (LE)	Affective (AF)
	Cognitive (CG)
	Psychomotor (PS)

Table 2
Area Components by Occurrence in the Glossary (#); by Title Occurrence (##); by Title Frequency (f); and by Per Cent of Frequencies (%)

Area Components	Glossary #		Usage of Words in Titles ##	f	%
Adult Learner					
Age	8		3	34	41
Limitation	11		5	13	16
Status	31		9	24	29
Social Relation	11		8	12	14
Sub-total	61	12%	25	83	100
Learning					
Affective	79		9	17	39
Cognitive	72		6	20	47
Psychomotor	24		4	6	14
Sub-total	177	35%	19	43	100
Process					
Approach	19		6	4	4
General Planning	26		13	57	54
Specific Planning	29		5	17	16
Events	31		4	6	6
Media & Material	31		2	2	2
Communications Technique	21		6	6	6
Support Technique	33		7	14	13
Sub-total	190	38%	41	101	100
Environment					
Date & Time	16		5	16	28
Locale	14		12	16	28
Institutional Support	19		4	16	28
Interpersonal Climate	26		4	8	14
Sub-total	75	15%	25	56	100
Total	503	100%	188	283	

Table 3
Area Combinations by Type of Publication: Concept Occurrence (#), and Per Cent (%) of Total Occurrences

Area Concept	Article #	Article %	Proceed. #	Proceed. %	Report #	Report %	Book #	Book %	Total #	Total %
Single										
AD	50	69	41	65	26	49	14	42	131	59
PR	43	60	34	79	42	79	22	66	141	64
EN	53	74	36	57	41	77	25	75	155	70
LE	50	69	40	63	35	66	27	81	152	69
Dual										
PR AD	28	39	24	38	20	37	7	21	79	36
EN AD	38	53	23	36	19	36	10	30	90	41
LE AD	33	46	26	41	17	32	12	36	88	40
EN PR	29	40	11	17	32	60	15	45	87	39
LE PR	34	47	22	35	29	55	17	51	102	46
EN LE	37	51	22	35	27	51	21	64	107	48
Triple										
EN LE PR	22	30	8	13	24	54	12	36	66	30
EN PR AD	17	24	8	13	14	26	4	12	43	19
LE PR AD	21	29	16	25	10	19	6	18	53	24
EN LE AD	20	28	11	17	16	30	7	22	54	24
Quadruple										
AD PR EN LE	15	21	6	9	11	21	1	3	33	16

Table 4
Method of Inquiry Descriptors by Glossary Occurrence (#) and by Title Occurrence (##), Title Frequency (F), and Per Cent of Total Frequency (%)

Methodology	Glossary	Usage in Titles		
	#	##	f	%
Approach				
Quantitative	47	3	10	14
Qualitative	42	8	27	38
Strategy				
Method	10	3	8	11
Technique	21	13	23	33
Instrument	41	2	3	4
Total	161	29	71	100